MARVIN HASLIP

WOULDN'T BE LICKED

Roberts, Charles LaVerne

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Wouldn't Be Licked

They Said It Couldn't Be Done—But He's Doing It

Melvin Haslip — Blind Shoe Rebuilder

"IMPOSSIBLE," most of you would say. Yet, if you come to the city of Lansing, Michigan, and go to 608 Brook St., a ocation in the residential district of the :ity, you will see a shop run by a man who has been totally without sight :ince he was twelve years of age.—Melvin Haslip, the owner and manager of the shop, runs it just the same as you would run yours—and for the last :hirteen years has been giving satisfac:ory service to an ever increasing num:er of customers.

Haslip's story reads like a pioneer business romance. At the age of twelve he lost his sight by an accident on the ce, in a lumber camp; at that time he was entirely without any school learning. So, at thirteen years of age, on January 1, 1907, he came down to the Michigan School for the Blind, at Lansing, Michigan. Imagine, if you can, the situation in which he found himself. Years behind the other students of his age, with the crude unlettered ways and speech of a lumber-jack community of the old days. Melvin has told me many times how the other kids laughed at him because he used such expressions as "pretty-nigh".

Yet, in just seven years Melvin had graduated from the full grammar school and high school course offered by the Michigan School for the Blind—a twelve grade course equivalent to that offered by the ordinary high schools for the sighted children throughout the state. In addition to that, he also studied broom-making, hammock-making, manual training, (work in wood) and took a commercial course.

Couldn't Believe It Possible

AFTER graduation from high school, young Haslip began canvassing, selling goods from house to house. He made his living at this work until 1917, when, with the opening of American participation in the War, there was an increased demand for more workers in the factories. Most of these shops had been closed to the blind previous to this time,—not that the blind could not do the work, but simply because of the foolish prejudices of the factory owners and shop superintendents,—afraid that the blind man would get hurt, afraid that the blind man couldn't do the work as rapidly, and countless other objections, most of which were founded purely on preconceived prejudices and which fell like a house of cards on the first trial of a blind worker on the job.

Haslip was employed by the Lansing Company, a local concern engaged in making various types of trucks. His work consisted of completely assembling two-wheeled trucks. During the business slump which followed the War, Haslip, along with many others was laid off from the Lansing Company, and returned to his former trade of pushing doorbells, until 1922, when he went to Saginaw to learn shoe repairing.

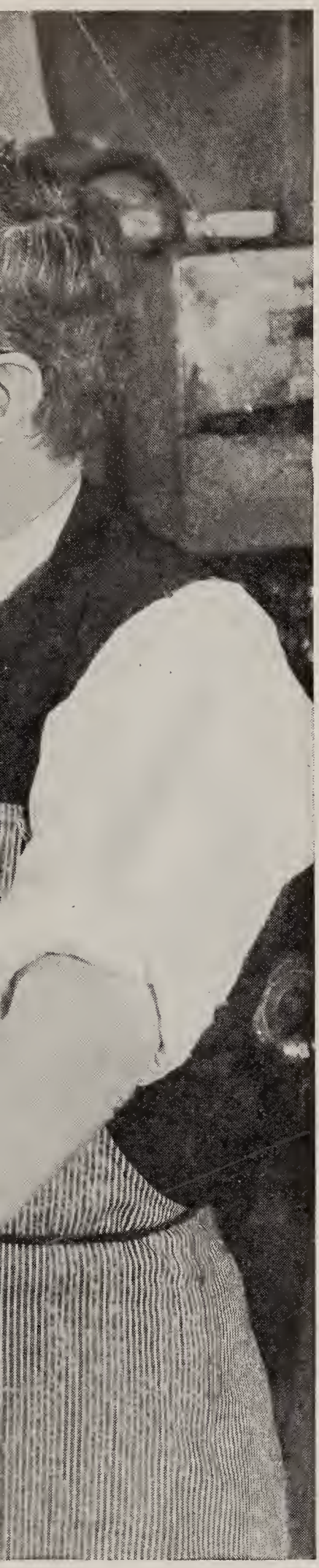
In the shop where Haslip learned the trade, they had an old-style stitcher, a finisher without a trimmer on it, and an old-style jack,—so any reader who thinks some special machinery to coddle him along, because he was blind, was used in the shop, can understand that such was not the case. In the fall of that year, he returned to Lansing, and opened his own shop.

Starts In for Himself

NOT possessing a limitless supply of capital, he had to start with such tools and machinery as he could afford. He started out with a jack, a sole cutter, and skiver, a second-hand patching machine, and an old dilapidated finisher.—"It took about a year to discover," Haslip told me, "that if a blind man was to remain in business it would be necessary to have up-to-date equipment, because my customers would naturally look the work over more closely than they would that of my competitors. This old equipment would not give the same results as a modern, up-to-date equipment; therefore, I endeavored to purchase a modern layout."

It was not long before he had a curve needle stitcher, and a new finisher with a trimmer on it. "I found these machines very easy to operate," said Haslip, "and they brought me in enough extra business to pay for them. About a year later I purchased a stapling machine. This equipment served me until the depression was about half over.

NOTE — This article was written by Charles LaVerne Roberts, an attorney who is also blind.



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WINGFOOT SOLES AND HEELS

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MORE PEOPLE ASK FOR GOODYEAR WINGFOOT HEELS THAN FOR ANY OTHER KIND

Then business began to lag, so I looked into the sole cementing business and purchased a cement press this last winter. I am getting along very well with it. I apply cement with a brush and get it on evenly and at the same time keep it from smearing the upper of the shoe, which is a very difficult task. This operation I eased by applying the cement with my first and second finger on the right hand, holding the shoe in my left hand and the upper and the bottom of the shoe down. In this way I can apply the cement easily and prevent it from smearing the upper. I also apply cement with my fingers to the half-sole or the full sole.

Making Heels Level

"ANOTHER thing which slowed up my production was leveling the heels on ladies' shoes. This I overcame by purchasing a small disc about six inches in diameter on the spindle and a small sized drill press and placing the flat disc on the spindle where the chuck would ordinarily go. On the bottom of this plate I cemented a piece of sand paper. Then I had a jig made so that I could tilt it up or down, and the top of this jig accommodated a last.

"I place a lady's shoe on this last, start the motor, take hold of the lever, sand the heel until it is level, then I hold the lever with the press down so that the scouring disc rests on the heel, lock it there, drop the collar, on the drill spindle, down to the stopper and release the machine. Then I put the other shoe in and sand it down as far as the drill press will allow, and both heels are absolutely true. The machine runs at a very rapid speed and the leveling is done very quickly.

"Another thing which I use," Mr. Haslip went on to say, "is a nail spacer, enabling me to space nails an even distance apart. It consists of a flat piece of metal with a slot in one end just the length that I want the nails apart. I lay this on the bottom of the sole, and take an awl and mark the sole all the way around. Of course, I do not use it a great deal as the stapler takes the place of nailing."

Waiting on Customers

"WELL," I can hear most of you saying, "this is all very well —the mechanical end, but when a customer comes into his shop how does he know what color the shoes are and how does he keep his inks separate, etc?"— The trouble is that most people depend so much upon their sight that they cannot imagine any other way of doing things. When a customer comes in, Haslip always inquires the color of the shoes, and writes this on a tag, in the braille system, (the raised type used by the blind) and never yet has he had any trouble from this source. He marks his inks with an awl.

The people who patronize this sightless mender of soles come from all walks of life, and all classes of the community. Electricians, factory employees, doctors, lawyers, business men, bankers, salesmen,—so you can readily see that he is the kind of a man whose work, and whose personality, appeals to all.

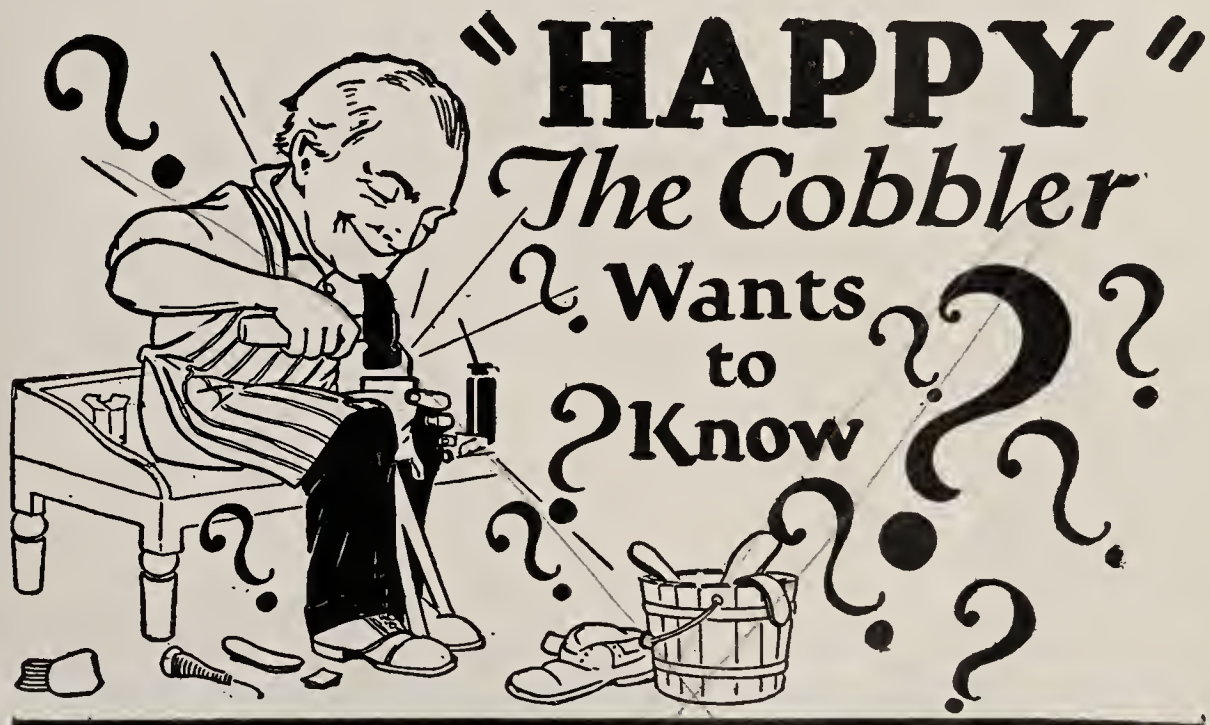
Mr. Haslip has a lovely wife, and owns his own home. He is at all times interested in the affairs of the community. When a project for curbing and other street improvements was being agitated, Haslip was one of the leaders. Whenever anything is suggested for the betterment of the neighborhood, the ward, or the city, he is not only interested, but gets into action.

Interested in Entire Industry

AND what is even more to the point, Haslip is vitally interested in the welfare and advancement of the national shoe repair movement. Of all the various shoe repairmen in Lansing, a city of around eighty thousand inhabitants, he was the only man to go to the Cincinnati Convention. "We've got to organize, and advance our organization," Haslip stated. "And that means that every man has got to get right out and boost, a hundred per cent interest in our national organization. I got a whole lot out of that Cincinnati convention, and the boys who failed to get there don't know what they missed. I wouldn't have missed it for anything, this year, and I'll be at the convention in 1936."

That is the spirit of all-around service that this shoe repairman stands for. If you think he spends his time lamenting the criticisms and foolish prejudices of the uninformed sighted public which have made his advance a struggle up the ladder of success every step of the way, then let me suggest to any of you who may be in Lansing at any time to come up to Haslip's shop and see him.

Except during certain hours on week-days, when he is at the shop in the Michigan School for the Blind, where he is instructor in shoe repairing, you will find him there, greeting his customers and visitors with a smile, discussing politics, business, sports, or whatever may happen to interest you, in an informed, tolerant and pleasant way, and at the same time turning out work which evidently pleases the public,—because when they come once, they always come again.



1—What are the six principal types of shoes being made today?

2—Which signer of the Declaration of Independence was a shoemaker?

3—When were rubber heels introduced to this industry?

4—Who was the inventor of the McKay stitcher?

5—Who was the inventor of the Goodyear stitcher?

6—When were stitchers first used in shoe repair shops?

7—How old is the process of tanning leather?

8—Why do packer hides bring more money than country hides?

9—What distinguished American poet was a shoemaker in his youth?

10—How high can you go with a "shoe-lift"?

Answers to these Questions will be found on another page. But don't look now. See if you can answer them first.

ARE YOU TAKING IT ON THE CHIN?

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